

A Patient's Guide to Dentistry's Dispute Resolution Program

A Peer Review Process

About Peer Review

Peer review is a process by which the dental profession reviews and resolves problems or misunderstandings regarding dental treatment. Peer review exists for the benefit of the patient and the dentist. The process is completely voluntary and there is no cost for either party. The Alabama Dental Association has nine geographic district societies. Each district has its own peer review committee that follows guidelines established by the American Dental Association and the Alabama Dental Association.

A peer review committee consists of dentists who volunteer their time and expertise to consider questions about the appropriateness or quality of dental care. The members of the committee are impartial and their goal is to mediate a reasonable and mutually agreeable solution for the parties involved.

A dispute may be resolved through mediation alone, or through review of patient records and clinical examination (this process is known as Binding Arbitration).

The Review Process

A written Request for Review form is submitted to the state peer review associate. The request should include all necessary and appropriate documentation that would help to clarify or support the circumstances. **[Click here to download the form.](#)**

The request is reviewed for completeness and to ensure the complaint is appropriate for peer review. If the complaint is accepted, it is then referred to the appropriate district peer review committee.

- The chairman of the peer review committee reviews the request and appoints one member of the committee to serve as mediator.
- The mediator contacts all parties and attempts to reconcile the problem. A clinical examination is not conducted during the process of mediation.
- If the problem is successfully mediated, a written report is submitted to the committee chairman and the case is closed. If a resolution is not achieved in mediation, either party may request Binding Arbitration.
- If both parties agree to Binding Arbitration, a district committee is formed and a date is set for a hearing to discuss the case, examine clinical records, talk to the patient and the dentist and, if necessary, arrange for a clinical examination.

- The committee concludes its review and all parties are notified of the decision and recommendations in writing.
- If either party is not satisfied with the decision and can show just cause for an appeal, the case can be appealed to the state peer review committee.
- The decision of the appellate body is final within the peer review context.
- All information regarding a particular case is kept strictly confidential.

Matters not appropriate for Peer Review

There are some issues that may arise between a patient and dentist that are not appropriate for the peer review process. These include complaints that are in any stage of litigation, problems with dental office staff, and suspected violations of Alabama's Dental Practice Act. Information on the Dental Practice Act and how to report suspected violations may be obtained by clicking on the link to the Board of Dental Examiners of Alabama.

Peer Review Limitations

- The Alabama Dental Association has no authority to impose any type of disciplinary actions against a dentist and participation in peer review is voluntary.
- While a refund of charges is one option that may be offered during mediation, peer review cannot seek reimbursement for pain, suffering, loss of work or punitive damages.

In Summary

Peer review provides an impartial, free and easily accessible means for resolving misunderstandings regarding dental treatment. It exists for the benefit of the patient and the dentist.

Peer review is not a court of law and has no disciplinary functions. It is a voluntary process that relies on good faith between a dentist and a patient and their mutual interest in good dental health.

Communication is a vital part of the doctor-patient relationship, but if you have an issue with your dentist that you cannot resolve, you may complete the Request for Review form and mail to:

Alabama Dental Association
Attention: Peer Review Coordinator
836 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36104